



# International Center of Outdoor Recreational Equipment



*An overview of Greater Seattle's outdoor recreational industry for prospective partners in business, investment and research.*

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## Overview

Washington state has a natural setting matched by few places in the world. Washington state's diverse topography and weather patterns create one of the most unique regions in the world. In a state that has two mountain ranges, a rainforest, desert, lakes, rivers and the Pacific Ocean, outdoor enthusiasts are certain to find an activity to match their interests. With a thriving market and a well-educated working class, an industry devoted to the Great Outdoors and creating equipment to enjoy time outdoors has developed. Encouraged by Greater Seattle's high-tech environment, local companies have evolved into world-class manufacturers of recreational equipment creating new and innovative products.

Greater Seattle is one of the fittest cities in the country, a distinction based on activity levels within the city. Residents of the region spend much less time than the national average in front of the television and they lead the nation in participating in sailing and kayaking. This is the tip of the iceberg for activities and outdoor pursuits. Washington's large population of outdoor enthusiasts eagerly snap up skis, mountain bikes, camping gear, golf clubs, snowboards, kayaks, fishing rods and other outdoor recreational equipment. But locals are not the only ones to enjoy such goods- the industry ranked in the top 20 of Washington state's exports, totaling \$195 million in 2001.

A long tradition of direct importation, contract manufacture, critical alliances and strategic location make Greater Seattle an excellent setting for expansion by businesses based in Europe, Asia, Latin America and around the world. An unwavering commitment to quality, a huge pool of talented engineers and product designers, world-class retail and mail-order distribution all mark this region as a logical investment for companies connected with outdoor recreational equipment. In a location equidistant by air between Europe and Asia, Greater Seattle has world-class airport and marine ports making it an ideal entry point for international companies wishing to explore the United States' market for outdoor recreational equipment.

Already, international alliances and business partnerships are springing up. A partnership between locally-based K2 and Japan-based Shimano developed the current state-of-the-art snowboard boot binding system. Spiegel Inc. of Germany bought locally-founded Eddie Bauer, a pioneer in the outdoor equipment and apparel industry. Helly Hansen, another leader in high performance outdoor apparel, has roots in Norway's fishing industry. In addition, JanSport, maker of top quality backpacks, is building a proprietary distribution system in Europe, that will enable 48-hour fulfillment of all retail orders. This system will supplement a 10,000 square foot factory and an equipment production facility, both located in Washington.

credit goes to the [Mountaineers](#). Started as a regional climbing and conservation organization in 1906, the Mountaineers has over 15,000 members. In 1961, the organization formed a publishing arm that is now the nation's leading publisher of how-to manuals, regional hiking and climbing guides, adventure travel and trekking descriptions and tales of expeditions.

Its best-seller ever, *Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills*, was the first of what are now more than 350 titles in print. Built from class notes used in the Mountaineers' highly regarded climbing courses and translated into six other languages, *Freedom of the Hills* is the definitive handbook for anyone wishing to learn how to spend time in the mountains safely and comfortably. Hikers and climbers use the Mountaineers' trail guides, books, and training programs to learn critical mountaineering skills. Many Greater Seattle outdoor equipment manufacturing companies credit the Mountaineers for helping them develop a strong regional customer base. [Mountaineers Books](#), operated as an extension of the club, now publishes 40 titles per year. General bookstores, as well as specialty retailers such as REI, distribute these books.

## Examples of Products Produced in Greater Seattle Area

Washington state is home to over 35 manufacturers of outdoor recreational equipment. These manufacturers generate a variety of products, such as:

- **Camping Gear** from mountain climbing equipment to sleeping bags. Washington's manufacturers supply an assortment of products designed for safe enjoyment of the outdoors.
- **Mountain Biking Gear Equipment** for the increasingly popular sport including bikes and the necessary accessories.
- **Recreational Boating Options** of pleasure craft and custom designed boats for whitewater, freshwater and saltwater recreation.
- **Fishing Equipment** Specialized rods, lures, tackle packs and other fishing accessories
- **Recreational Snow Equipment** Innovative designs for skis, snowshoes and snowboards. Large growth in the snowboarding industry complements an already strong alpine skiing industry. Washington's manufacturers supply the gear to meet their demands.
- **Outdoor Apparel and Sportswear Attire** specifically designed for extreme weather and other outdoor conditions.
- **Outdoor Footwear** State of the art hiking and trail footwear.

## Information on Greater Seattle Outdoor Recreational Companies

### Camping, Hiking & More

[Cascade Designs](#), whose founders Jim Lea and John Burroughs were former Boeing employees, was founded in 1972 and sold the founders' invention, Therm-a-Rest® mattress. The company continues to manufacture a variety of sleeping bags and pads specifically designed to promote peaceful sleep.

Besides dominating the camping stove market, [Mountain Safety Research \(MSR\)](#) produces water filters, carabiners, cookware sets and other gear for outdoor excursions. Founded in 1969 by Larry Penberthy to research the safety and integrity of climbing equipment, MSR has grown into a well-respected company whose products from gourmet food to durable tents make it world renowned. MSR provides products to more than 1,200 specialty retailers in North America and exports to more than 30 countries.

[REI](#), the preeminent outdoor equipment and apparel retailer, supplies an endless variety of items for outdoor use- all of which are available at their stores, through their popular catalog business and through the Internet.

### Recreation

SOFTRIDE's mountain bikes are designed to reduce the jarring associated with the sport without diminishing power or control. The World Mountain Bike Championship winners in 1992, '93, and '94, as well as the 1994 Ironman and various other mountain biking champions, all rode SOFTRIDE designs in competition. SOFTRIDE also produces racks and suspension systems designed to complement their bikes.

Established in 1961 by brothers with the idea of building fiberglass skis, [K2](#)'s products are found on the slopes, the ice and the road. Perhaps best known for their skis - in 1995, they introduced the K2 Four, which is built "to counteract edge-perturbing vibration" - K2 also leads the way in the snowboarding industry with innovative products like the Fatbob board, the skating industry with the introduction of SoftBoot™ technology and the biking industry with a range of products including mountain and cross bikes.

The Hyarc™ inline articulating snowboard- a new design by Hyarc and engineered at Pacific Northwest Laboratories of Richland, WA, works to combine snowboarding with surfing and skiing.

### On the Water

As many fans of whitewater kayaking know, finding a good boat can be frustrating. In 1978, John Abbenhouse, then a 22 year-old nationally ranked whitewater kayaker, grew tired of waiting around for two custom-built kayaks from a local builder. Abbenhouse took the initiative, decided to try it himself, and built his own kayaks in his garage. With that, [Northwest Kayaks](#) got its start and today the company continues to produce a variety of high-grade kayaks designed for speed, versatility, control and roominess- all built to customer specification.

[North Coast Yachts](#) manufactures fiberglass pleasure boats with over eighty percent of their sales in the international market.

U.S. Marine, Inc., the largest manufacturer of pleasure boats in the nation, offers over 65 models for different recreational needs.

When the sport is fishing, [G. Loomis, Inc.](#) is an active participant. The company manufactures spinning, casting, saltwater and fly rods designed for high sensitivity and performance. In addition, they produce fishing lures, vests and tackle packs- all the necessary accessories for fishing. G. Loomis has retailers all over the United States and has distributors in more than 20 countries.

Started in 1980, [Sage](#) is a leading manufacturer of high quality fly fishing rods. With six different series of hand-crafted fly rods, Sage rounds out its product line with reels, blanks, fly lines, rod & reel cases and gear. Sage's products are currently sold in Australia, New Zealand, Asia, South Africa, South America and across Europe.

### **Apparel & Footwear**

Washington manufacturers realized a long time ago that the appropriate attire is essential to fully and safely enjoy the outdoors. Today there are numerous retailers and suppliers of top quality sportswear and outerwear- among them Eddie Bauer, REI, Filson, Helly Hansen, Gerry, Roffe & Demetre.

For one hundred years, [Filson](#) has produced, what they term "better outdoor clothes," which are durable enough to be passed from generation to generation. Filson and others offer a variety of outdoor apparel including ski sweaters, waterproof outerwear, hiking boots, and every other type of specialized outdoor apparel imaginable.

[Montrail, Inc.](#) designs, sells and distributes state-of-the-art footwear for peak outdoor performance. Montrail's products include running shoes with special off road protection, lightweight shoes with the protection and support of a hiking boot, supportive and rugged hiking boots and insoles for added stability and comfort.

[Brooks Sports Inc.](#), began in 1914 with the design of a fashionable bathing shoe. Since that time, Brooks has developed into a company that produces a top line of technical running gear. With an acknowledgement about the culture of running, Brooks has developed a line of clothing as well as a newsletter for its runners. The company has developed an international market and Brooks International reaches Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe and South America.

## **REI: Foundation for an Industry**

A group of 23 resourceful Seattle climbers, led by Lloyd Anderson, got together in 1938 and formed a cooperative that today serves millions of climbers, backpackers, mountain bikers, hikers, kayakers, and campers from around the world- The Recreational Equipment Cooperative, now known as [REI](#). The initial objective was to give members access to high-quality climbing and camping gear as cheaply as possible. As members gained experience buying and using the equipment, they experimented in making their own. In 1944, faced with wartime shortages of European gear, Anderson hired a local blacksmith to make pitons and ice axes, the first products manufactured by REI. In 1963, REI employee Jim Whittaker became the first American to climb Mt. Everest- carrying his REI gear in an REI Cruiser Pack.

These early efforts led to the 1967 formation of THAW Corporation, a subsidiary making clothing and sleeping bags; the 1981 acquisition of Mountain Safety Research (MSR), a leading manufacturer of lightweight stoves and climbing hardware; the 1993 acquisition of Walrus, Inc., an innovative tent manufacturer; and the 1994 purchase of Moss, Inc., an award winning tent designer.

REI produced its first “catalog” in 1938, a single 8 1/2 by 15 sheet of paper, listing a handful of items. In 1995, Consumer Reports recognized REI as one of the nation’s top four mail-order companies, and Climbing Magazine deemed REI the most knowledgeable, service-oriented mail-order supplier of climbing hardware.

Throughout its history, REI has involved itself in product development and testing, forming its own Quality Control Department in 1971 and Product Development Department in 1988. True to its beginnings as a membership-based cooperative and to the founders’ commitment to conservation and public service, in 1996 REI declared a 10.5 percent patronage dividend to members. Additionally, between 1995 and 1996 REI made conservation grants totaling more than \$1.3 million, and coordinated 72 service projects through its retail locations. REI Service Projects brought together 6,139 volunteers who gave more than 32,000 hours of their time to create and improve trails, clean rivers, and increase recreational opportunities in their communities.

REI’s flagship store in Seattle (designed by local firm [Mithun Partners, Inc.](#)) includes a footwear test trail, an outdoor mountain bike test trail and the world’s tallest freestanding indoor climbing structure at 65-feet tall, the REI Pinnacle. REI’s store draws visitors from all over the world.

## RedBird Sports

While nearly everyone in Seattle will claim to have climbed Mt. Rainier at least three times and the typical coffeehouse lingo is of carabiners and harnesses, a growing number of northwesterners have quite a different view of what constitutes outdoor recreational equipment- they talk about golf clubs. Like elsewhere, golf course construction, golf instruction, and design innovations in golf clubs have all increased in the Greater Seattle area. One of the nation's premier golf club manufacturers around, RedBird Sports, located just north of downtown Seattle.

RedBird bases its business on a simple premise- You didn't come off an assembly line, why settle for golf clubs that do? When their craftsmen look at a golf club, they don't just see a head, a shaft, and a grip (although they can design a club more than 100,000 different ways), they see you, their customer. Founders Jay Turner and Steve Cole believe that with clubs custom built to fit the individual allow for a "superior performance, and that in turn results in superior enjoyment of the game." Building custom-fitted mid-priced golf clubs since 1985, RedBird has acquired an international reputation for their craftsmanship and performance. "We build everything to fit," Turner has said. And RedBird can deliver a set of clubs in five to seven working days, a considerable advantage compared to the industry average of 4 to 8 weeks.

While REI can't help you here, you can get fitted for a set of RedBird clubs through a national network of pro shops using RedBird's custom fitting process. RedBird takes into account your unique physique, your ability, and your goals, and recommends a mix of grip size, shaft material, clubhead design, loft and lie angles, and shaft length and flex, all personally fitted to you.

## Contacts

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